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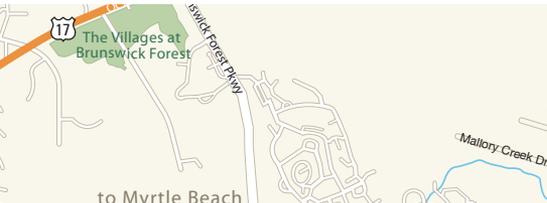
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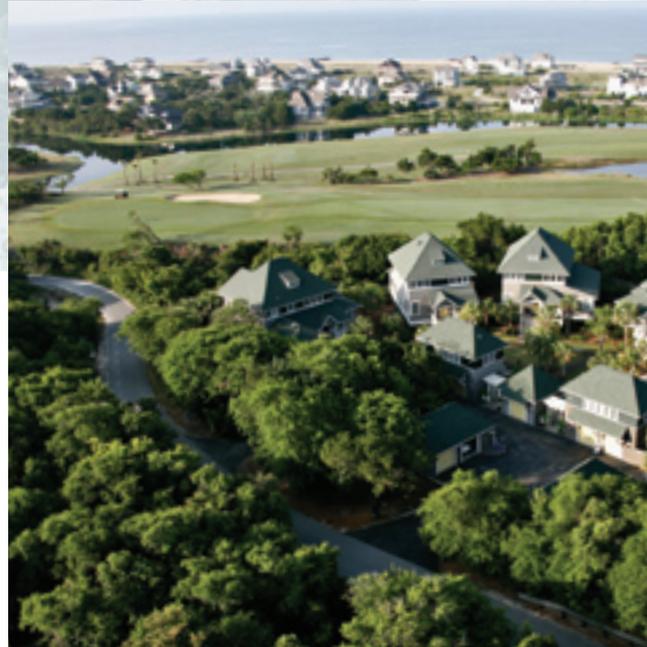
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Car-free & Care-free

STORY BY BILLY JASON FRYE

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BALD HEAD ISLAND LIMITED



The Cape Fear region abounds with daytrip destinations from historical to recreational to relaxing. On Bald Head Island, located just off the coast near Southport, you can find all three. Because there are no cars on the island, a daytrip allows you to escape the hustle and bustle of mainland life and connect with the island's varied environments. Explore the island by electric golf cart, by bicycle or on foot and discover the oldest lighthouse in North Carolina, 14 miles of gorgeous beaches and the peace and quiet not often found in a daytrip.

Getting There

Located 2 nautical miles (that's 2.3 miles to landlubbers) off the coast near Southport, Bald Head Island is the southernmost of North Carolina's barrier islands and is accessible only by private boat or passenger ferry. The ferry terminal is located at Indigo Plantation and Marina in Southport. This spring, ferry operations will move to a new location, Deep Point Marina, also in Southport. Be sure to check www.baldheadisland.com or call (910) 457-5003 before you leave. (See our sidebar Deep Point Marina.)

The 20-minute ferry ride across the Intracoastal Waterway and Cape Fear River offers beautiful views of Southport, Oak Island and, of course, Bald Head Island. To the west (the right, or port side of the ferry), Oak Island Lighthouse is hard to miss, and ahead, to the southeast, Old Baldy rises above the trees. Observant ferry riders will sometimes see pods of dolphins escorting the ferry, fishing in the marsh or entertaining onlookers at the Southport pier.

Getting Around

There are no cars allowed on Bald Head Island (only service and emergency vehicles are gas-powered). Transportation is limited to electric golf carts, bicycles and foot traffic. Just a few steps away from the ferry terminal on Bald Head Island is Riverside Adventure Company, (910) 457-4944, the hub for bicycle and golf cart rentals on the island. Rentals are available on an hourly or daily basis.

Exploring the Island

Once you have your golf cart (or bicycle), head to Old Baldy, North Carolina's oldest lighthouse, commissioned by Thomas Jefferson in 1817. Admission to Old Baldy and the adjoining



Smith Island Museum of History is through the museum's gift shop, where you'll pick up your I Supported Old Baldy sticker and get a grasp on the island's seafaring history through photographs and artifacts. Climb the 108 steps to the top of Old Baldy for a

experienced guide from Riverside Adventures or the Bald Head Island Conservancy, (910) 457-0089.

Experienced kayakers can simply rent a kayak and explore the creek and marsh at their own pace. You may see dolphins fishing, as well as osprey,

parking for bicycles and golf carts. West Beach, South Beach and East Beach (so named for their orientation to the cardinal directions) offer vastly different experiences. South Beach, the island's best for beachcombing, features calm waters and a wide array of shells.



360-degree view of the island: Bald Head Creek winds through the salt marsh (you may kayak there later), the maritime forest stretches to the ocean in three directions, and you'll never know you're only a few miles from home.

If you're more adventurous and want to get up close and personal with the island's flora and fauna, try a guided kayak tour of Bald Head Creek and the salt marsh under the watchful eye of an

Above:

Bald Head Island is one of the most scenic islands on the North Carolina coast.

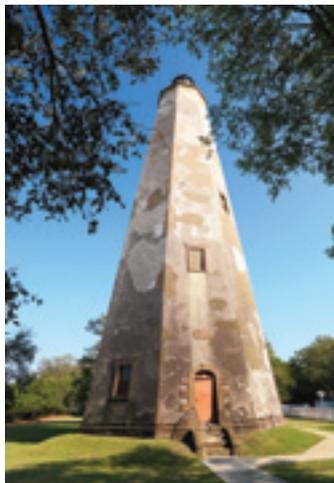
red-tailed hawk, night heron or any number of birds, so bring your camera and binoculars for a better look at what you'll find.

The M. Kent Mitchell Nature Trail follows a marked path through the maritime forest and along the salt marsh and tidal creek. A great way to familiarize yourself with two of the island's environments, it is also a great short trail (20 minutes round trip) for the younger members of your party.

If a hike isn't your idea of a day at the beach, try a walk along the 14 miles of beaches on Bald Head Island. Public access is plentiful and accommodates

If you are looking to surf, East Beach offers the best waves. West Beach offers a unique fishing experience due to the tidal influence of the Cape Fear River.

At the easternmost point of the Island, at the convergence of East and South Beaches, you'll find Frying Pan Shoals (so named because they extend from the island like the handle of a frying pan). The shoals, once the sight of many shipwrecks, extend into the ocean for quite a way, and, at low tide, some become exposed, quickly becoming home to flocks of gulls, terns and pipers.





Left: Kayaking through the salt marshes and tidal creeks is the best way to familiarize yourself with the island environments.

Dining

There are many dining options available on Bald Head Island. Eb & Flo's Steambar, (910) 457-7217, located in the harbor, is a casual, crab-shack sort of restaurant with seating options inside or out on the deck. Lunch and dinner are served daily, and during the season nightly specials and events are common; call ahead for details.

The River Pilot Café, (910) 457-7390, also at the harbor, is more upscale, featuring classic Southern dishes with a modern twist. The Maritime Market, (910) 457-7450, a full-service grocery store, features a café serving take-out or dine-in breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. Both restaurants feature a full bar, and the Maritime Market has a variety of wines for sale.

Overlooking Frying Pan Shoals is The Shoals Club, a beach club offering fine dining indoors or on the covered deck overlooking the pools and Atlantic Ocean, and casual dining poolside at the Sandbar Grille. Membership is

required for use of the facilities, but temporary memberships are granted to those visitors who rent a property through Bald Head Island Limited. During summer months, The Shoals Club Recreation Department coordinates activities for the entire family — concerts, scavenger hunts, beach games, and holiday carnivals and activities, to name a few.

The Bald Head Island Club also offers fine and casual dining for its members (temporary memberships are also granted to those who rent through Bald Head Island Limited), as well as croquette greenswards, tennis courts, an Olympic-sized swimming pool and a fantastic golf course. The Bald Head Island Club course plays just over 6,000 yards and was rated 4.5 stars by *Golf Digest*. The beautifully maintained course takes advantage of the topography of Bald Head Island as it wanders through maritime forest, freshwater lagoons and dunes that overlook the Atlantic Ocean. Don't forget to stop in the Pro Shop for golf, tennis and croquet gear.

Shopping

Shopping options on the island are primarily located at the Shops on Maritime Way, right by the Maritime Market at the center of the island. Canopy Outfitters, Maritime Passage and Wayfarer feature family island wear and accessories, along with Bald Head Island logo apparel — think cool sunglasses, new flip-flops and fun sundresses.

The Woods Gallery, an art gallery with a range of artists and mediums, features local, regional and international artists' interpretations of the island (they also host artist receptions from time to time).

Next to the Maritime Market is Silver Peddler, where you'll find beautiful jewelry as well as gifts for your home and garden. Island Retreat Spa and Salon, offering full-service treatments, will be opening this spring at the Shops on Maritime Way.

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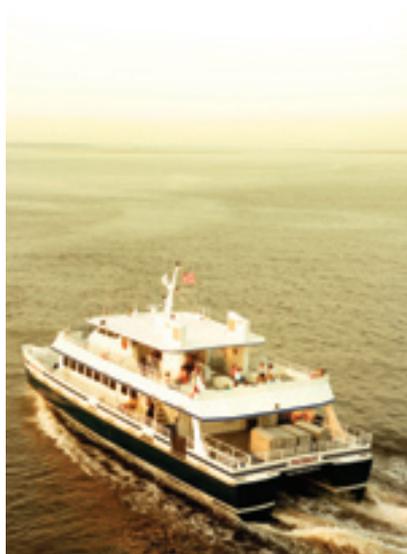
Turtle Central, located at the Bald Head Island Conservancy, sells environmentally oriented gifts, books and clothes for the whole family (proceeds benefit the Bald Head Island Conservancy, so your T-shirt purchase helps them help the island). While you are there, check to see if there are any educational programs being put on by the conservancy. Offerings include bird watching, crabbing and sea turtle programs.

Sleep Over

If you're looking for more than just a daytrip, stay for the weekend. Theodosia's Bed and Breakfast, located in Harbourside Village, features 10 guest rooms with beautiful island views (see www.theodosias.com).

A variety of rental homes are available through Bald Head Island Limited, ranging from grand beachfront houses to cozy marsh-side cottages. The Elements (Fire, Air, Water, Earth)

are cozy, efficiency-style cottages overlooking the harbor and are perfect for a couple looking to get away for the weekend. On the other end of the spectrum, beachfront homes with room for as many as 15 are perfect for larger groups such as family reunions. All rentals include golf carts and temporary guest memberships to both The Shoals Club and The Bald Head Island Club. Visit www.baldheadisland.com for more information. ■



Deep Point Marina: Bald Head Island's New Southport Ferry Terminal

This spring, Bald Head Island's mainland ferry terminal will relocate from Indigo Plantation to Deep Point Marina. Deep Point Marina, located just before the Southport-Fort Fisher ferry landing at 1301 Ferry Road in Southport, will be a significant improvement over the old ferry terminal. The new layout will feature separate arrival and departure areas, as well as an indoor lounge for those waiting to depart for Bald Head Island. In addition to ticket sales and baggage service, Deep Point Marina will include a café serving cold and hot food, as well as beer, wine and soft drinks. A new, open-air reception area for rental check-ins and a real estate information desk will also be available.

How to Get There

To get to Deep Point Marina, travel to Southport and follow North Howe Street to East Moore Street, turn left and follow East Moore Street to Ferry Road. Deep Point Marina will be on your right.

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